

Dropping The Nets
Matthew 4: 12-23
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First United Methodist Church
Marquette, MI
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Could you do it? Imagine your sitting in your cubicle, or are out at your post, or on the job site, or in your classroom wherever your vocation takes you and you. Whatever a typical day might be and along comes a stranger and tells you simply to drop what you are doing and follow. I am often amazed at the gospel account of the response of Peter and Andrew and the sons of Zebedee they just stop with no questions asked and immediately they drop their nets and follow him. That takes a tremendous amount of faith.

Reminds of a funny joke about the 3 pastors who were fishing. They ran out of lemonade in their boat so the Methodist pastor says, oh I'll go get some. So he gets out of the boat and walks right over the top of the water and on to the shore to get the lemonade. The other two are stunned. Not to be out done the Presbyterian pastor says well I can do that too and says a short prayer and steps out of the boat and falls right into the water. On his way back, the Methodist pastor stops on the water and helps him back into the boat. Not to be outdone again the Baptist pastor says well I'll go get some ice and steps out of the boat and goes right into the water. The Methodist steps out onto the water helps his colleague back into the boat and walks back to shore returning shortly with the ice and sits back into the boat. Both the other pastors still stunned say: "Your faith and trust is so great. How did you do that and how can we have that faith?" The Methodist pastor looks at them and says, "Well first you have to know where the rocks are!"

It's a lot like our life today as refer back to this passage. Jesus doesn't promise that if they follow him, he will point out the dangers and obstacles that they will face, doesn't give them a master plan displayed on PowerPoint of what they will accomplish. If he did, I doubt they would have dropped their nets. He simply tells them that I will make you fishers of men or as we say: to fish for people in the modern translation. And just blindly they drop their nets and follow. The first disciples are called, and they respond.

Now as we read earlier in the passage, it is reasonable for us to assume that this is not the first time they have heard of Jesus. It may not even be the first time they saw Jesus. His work may have been known to the 4 of them, but still to drop everything, their livelihood and follow him would have been a scandal in those times just as it seems for some today. On the other hand we know of people who we just want to follow. Because of who they are and what they do there are people that just cannot help but be followed. This list is few and far between, but just like Jesus, God has sent others whom cannot help but be followed. Whether it is King David, or the Apostle Paul, or Saint Francis, or Martin Luther, or John Wesley. More recently people such as Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Theresa, and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King occasionally God sends us people who are called to transform the world and there are those whose only response is to drop everything and

follow them. Many pay the same price as Jesus at being Martyred for their cause, but even that cannot stop the work that God has placed for them. The same is true for us today as Disciples of Jesus Christ. God's work in him through us cannot be stopped.

Several years ago when a group of us were gathered for our First Pastorate seminar and someone from the benefits office was explaining in a workshop about clergy taxes, our health benefits, our deductions for salary, the pension plan and the like, one pastor seemingly overwhelmed blurted out "I thought we were just supposed to make disciples of Jesus Christ!" The presenter Rev. Wayne Barret said: well yes, but remember that Jesus had only a three year ministry, he wasn't married and didn't worry about a house, health benefits would have done him no good if you think about it, and he already had a pretty good retirement plan."

We want the security we want to know what lies ahead, but sometimes if we drop our nets, following the call that God has on our lives, we cannot help but want to follow. John C. Purdy goes so far to say that Christianity is a working persons religion. He says that: "You and I, who believe in Jesus Christ and count ourselves his disciples, are not to follow a trade or profession as though it were the Holy Grail. We are to follow Jesus. Work is to take a secondary role in our lives. If Christ is truly our Master, then work cannot be equally important. We may be engaged in work, but never married to it. And whenever we are pressed or tempted to make work supreme, we are to recall the story of the four fishermen. We are to remember how they left their nets and their boats to go and be with Jesus, to do what he would have them do."¹

In part he is right. We are not to be so married to our work that we get lost I the work itself. However, he treats this as a secondary way to pay the bills while our real job is about serving the church. To me this sets up an unhealthy dualism. What Jesus gives the Disciples and all of us is a sense of vocation. What are we called to do and be in life. If instead we approach our work not as secondary as Purdy suggests but instead, as an extension of our faith and the person that God has called us to be, we are in fact fulfilling the call on our lives. Not everyone is called to be a pastor, no matter how strong his or her faith, not everyone is called to be a teacher, or mechanic, or an engineer, but we all have the call to spread the message of Christ as a part of who we are. Not everyone can nor should "drop their nets" but we are all called to follow him. Some need to stay behind, some just cannot do it as in the rich young man, others Jesus does not invite to follow him, but simply says great is your faith.

Being a disciple can mean many things as long as we are being true to the calling on our lives. J Elsworth Kalas sums it up more holistically in his book Reading the Signs, From Empty Nets to Full Lives. He states: Perhaps our greatest problem in becoming Christ's fishermen is that we are not enough in earnest to grasp the opportunities that come to us; or we are so possessed of the idea that we must say something dramatic and far-reaching that we fail to say the small, immediate and potentially significant thing. To put it in the language of our lesson for the day, most of us really don't act as if we even

¹ John C. Purdy, The Call to Adventure

have a call to "fish." We're out in the waters of human need every day, but we don't seem to know it.

The issue is not that we should become more aggressive about sharing our faith. It is that we should be more sensitive to the needs of the world around us, and more sensitive to the subtle prodding of the Holy Spirit. The two sensitivities are wonderfully intertwined. To be sensitive to the Holy Spirit must mean that we will be more sensitive to people and their pain; to be more sensitive to people ought to make us more open to God and Gods *sic* purposes.²

Jesus is calling to us every day. Jesus calls us to a new sense of witness or vocation. Just like the disciples, he doesn't say how to do it, or even what will happen if you do it, he just offers the invitation to follow and he will teach us to fish until our nets are full. The question we leave with today is: will we, can we should we, drop our nets and follow him?

² J. Ellsworth Kalas, *Reading the Signs, From Empty Nets to Full Lives*, CSS Publishing Company.